

FEBRUARY 1996

*Field Naturalists
Club of Ballarat*
Incorporated

EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

**Meeting Feb 2 G Binns and L Fink - Western Australia
Revisited**

Meeting Mar 1 AGM / Members Night. Inland holiday theme

Excursion Feb 4 Mount Cole Traverse - K McDonnell

Excursion Mar 3 Laanecoorie - J Gregurke



To stimulate interest in natural history and to encourage the preservation and protection of the natural environment.

President: Mr J Gregurke
Secretary: Mr L Fink
Treasurer: Mr G Binns
Editor: Mr A Dyson

PO Box 328W. Ballarat West 3360

MEETINGS are held at the School of
Mines & Industries, Art Building,
Lydlard St. Sth., 7.30 pm.
EXCURSIONS start at "Book City",
cnr. Sturt and Annstrong Sts 9.30 am
(full day outings) or 1.30 pm (half day)

Field Reports

Alan Morrison - a koala on Smythes Road

Helen Burgess - a koala close to a ravens nest was attacked by birds. A Striated Pardalote calling in Moola Street.

Greg Binns - Little Eagle seen near Buninyong and Grey Fantails active in the Botanic Gardens.

John Stayt - about 400 Black Swans at Lake Corangamite and a dozen or so Magpie Geese.

Ken Hammond - Greenfinch in garage which persisted in perching before it could be "caught" and released.



Diary Dates

Thursday 22 February, 7.30 pm - Committee Meeting at (Pat Murphy).

EXCURSION TO MOUNT COLE SUNDAY 4th FEBRUARY 1996

For the purpose of our excursion "Mount Cole" refers to that mass of high country just North of the Western Highway and North West of Beaufort.

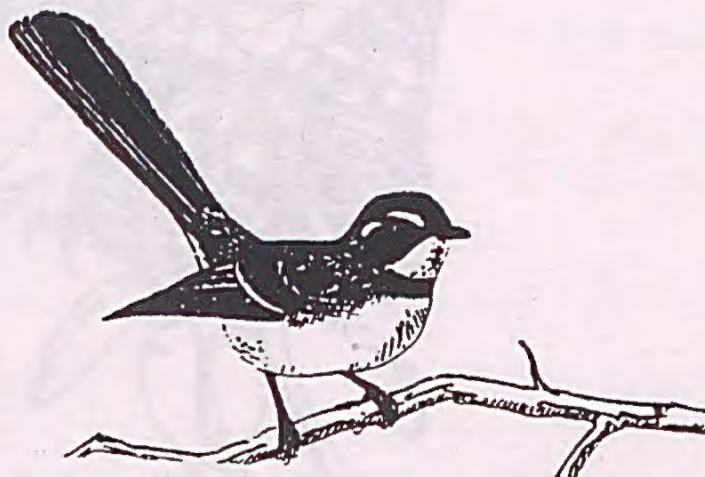
The plateau arose as a granitic intrusion through Ordovician sediments some 300 million years ago. (The Devonian Period). The high point today is Mt. Buangor at 990m. Other peaks are Sugarloaf, 960m, Mt Cole and Lookout Hill, 900m, and Ben Nevis 880m. The relative separation and geology of this block and its elevation above the plains provide a number of differing habitats marked by vegetational variations.

We will look at a number of these habitats with particular reference to the trees. There are fifteen species of Eucalyptus and sixteen of Acacia listed. We will also search for the fork fern, Tmesipteris obliqua, one of the simplest vascular plants, of a group with a history of about 400 million years.

Bring identification books such as Costermans "Trees of Victoria and Adjoining Areas", hand lenses & binoculars with you.

TRAVEL Depart: Book City 09.30. a.m.
Secondary rendezvous: Beaufort Rotunda 10.10. a.m.
Lunch: Chinaman Picnic Ground 12.30. p.m.
(N.W. side of forest approach from Warrack)

Grey Fantail



Butterflies and Remnant Vegetation

Meeting topic - December 1995

Dr Graeme Ambrose provided members with a very informative explanation of the butterflies of our district, referring to the special roles played by them, their habits, and their preferred habitats.

Butterflies have two important characteristics in that they are (i) indicator organisms, being more precise as indicators to climatic specifics and temperature than other species such as birds; and (ii) as specialists in plant usage, in the larval stage in food plants and in the adult stage of nectar plants.

Graeme discussed the different specie types, their preferred habitats and their relationship to the sunlight in these:

Forest core - active in warmer weather in open forest in morning and afternoon when the sunlight is at a low angle eg. Browns

Forest margins, large glades - sun warmed clearings and heat retaining 'micro climates'

Open country - some species prefer 'open living' eg. Whites, Yellows



Painted Lady on the everlasting
Dargan Hill Monach.



An interesting phenomenon described was 'hill-topping' when butterflies seek high ground in mating congregations, on mountain tops eg. Warrenheip and Buninyong.

Graeme provided a comprehensive listing of the butterfly families represented in the Ballarat district and the native plants known to attract the various species within these families - a welcome aid to our field observations and studies.

August to May is generally the period of most activity. But for now ie. February and March watch out for the Australian Admiral around the Nettle plants, the Bright Copper around the Bursaria, and the Chequered Swallowtail around the Mountain Scurf Pea.

We are grateful to Graeme for a most instructive session.

Greg Binns



Grey-headed Flying Foxes

Recently, while in Sydney, I went to see the Flying Foxes fly out of a nearby valley, for their nightly feed. These large bats occur from central Queensland to southern Victoria. The Kurring-gai Reserve protects a breeding population which reaches an estimated 50,000, depending on the food source.

They fly out at dusk and feed within a radius of 50 km. Sometimes called fruit bats they prefer the nectar and pollen of native plants such as eucalypts, melaleucas, turpentine and banksias. The nectar provides a rich energy source and the pollen provides protein.

Radiotracking has shown that they move large distances in their search for food, up to 800 km in several months. Populations of several hundred thousand can be seen at times when there is massed eucalyptus flowering.

When food is scarce the bats do raid orchards. Many orchardists are now protecting their trees with nets which is proving successful, for the orchardist.

During the daytime the bats doze, groom, chatter and jostle for the best positions in the trees. In spring females give birth to a single young, which is suckled for 6 months. They hold on to the mother as she goes on her nightly feed and at 4 weeks it is left in the colony with other babies during the night. At 4 months it is able to fly and feeds with the adults.

Unlike insect-eating micro-bats these flying foxes do not echolocate. They navigate and locate food by their excellent vision and keen sense of smell. A scent produced from glands on their shoulders enable them to recognise one another.

It is a magnificent sight to see these flying foxes, of differing size, fly out of the valley at dusk.

Helen Burgess

Hundreds of fluttering butterflies greeting us at Skydancers Butterfly Gardens. The large, shade cloth covered enclosure house a large collection of temperate butterflies. The garden is planted with many native and exotic food plants so many of the butterflies are breeding naturally.

The largest butterfly in the gardens was the Orchard Butterfly with a wing-span of 10cm. Butterflies have very good eyesight and Blue Triangles landed on people with blue shirts. The pheromones for the butterflies often attracts wild butterflies to the outside of the cage.

A Silver Wattle had been severely eaten by larvae of Imperial Blue, whose pupa were in bunches at the end of the stems. Sword-grass Brown Butterflies were active in a corner planted with *Gahnia sieberiana* and contained in pond to increase the humidity. There are several races of this species which have hybridized to the enclosure. Pampas grass is a hazard for Sword-grass Browns. The females will lay eggs on the pampas grass but the larvae starve to death when they hatch because they are unable to feed on the pampas grass.

Careful observation has resulted in new food plants being found for some species. The Macleay's Swallowtail larvae feed on Portwine Magnolia.

After lunch in the Castlemaine gardens we walked around the lake. Many Black Ducks swam to us expecting a free feed while Wood Ducks sheltered under the willows on an island. Dusky Moorhens had made a nest on the water amongst weeping willow foliage and several fluffy chicks were sitting in the nest.

We returned to Ballarat via Spargo Creek. On a short walk around a picnic area we found Blue Sun-orchid *Thelymitra pulchella*, Dotted Sun-orchid *T. ixiodes*, Beard Orchid and an Onion Orchid. Another interesting plant was Trailing Shaggy-pea *Podolobium procumbens* with its large apricot coloured flowers. Growing on a dam bank path was a Purple Apple-berry.

A Blue Wren flew out of a tussock grass near the Spargo mineral spring. A closer look revealed a nest with two small chicks.

Our last stop was at a moist gully with Red-fruit Saw-sedge *Gahnia sieberiana*. We searched for the Sword-grass Brown Butterfly. Eventually one flew from the bushes and was caught in a butterfly net for a closer inspection.

Thanks to Margaret Rotheram for leading the final excursion for 1995. JG.

Western Broad Nosed Bat

Nycticeius balstoni

Order Chiroptera Suborder Microchiroptera

Family Vespertilionidae.

This dry country species occurs in the vicinity of large lakes or rivers, where many known narrow hollows are available in the limbs of old redgums-- provide suitable roosting sites, since many of these openings are horizontal, many of the bats are unable to hang in the usual head down position, roosts are often shared with large colonies of Little Mastif Bats.

Open water near roosts provide a greater concentration of small flying insects especially mosquitoes than elsewhere on dry land.

They emerge at sundown to prey upon such food, and can often be seen hawking for insects.

They mate at the onset of winter usually late April to early May, after a seven month gestation period one or two young are born, they cling to the mother for about ten days and then left in the roosts during the next week they grow fur and their eyes open, they continue to develop until they can fly and hunt independently.

Their status is common and they should be found in Ballarat, there are two sub species,

Elfin

The rarest animal recorded alive is a Bat *Murina Florium*. One live specimen was captured alive in the Atherton Tableland in 1981, it was kept alive for 10 days.